

Effective Communication and Its Impact on Primary Health Care Delivery for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the influence of Effective Communication on Primary Health Care (PHC) delivery for sustainable development in Nigeria. The purpose was to find whether effective communication would have influence on PHC delivery. It was also carried out to improve Primary Health Care personnel communicative level with their patients. Secondary data were used to gather information for the study. This was done through an in-depth review of scholarly journals, articles, textbooks and research materials offline and online. The paper discussed the concept of Primary Health Care delivery, effective communication with clients, strategies for effective communication, various components of primary health care delivery for sustainable development and impediments to effective communication such as language barrier and disrespect for cultural value. The paper concluded that the provision of continuous and comprehensive health care through effective communication will improve the health condition of the populace and services to the community. It was recommended that appropriate language use and the need to respect the clients' cultural values would improve effective communication in Primary Health Care Delivery.

Keywords: Communication, Primary, Health, Culture, Sustainable, Development.

Introduction

Effective communication is the ability to convey information to another effectively and efficiently. Communication is done mostly through the use of language, but it could be done through verbal and

non-verbal means. It is only through communication that information could be passed across to another, using the right means or language that the audience or clients would understand. For a communication to be effective the language

used in communicating it must not be ambiguous and it must respect the cultural value of the receiver to ensure that the message is beneficial to the receiver at this primary health care level. Effective communication with clients involves ability to communicate with clarity and respect for the personality of clients. It relies on the synergistic use of three strategic components: advocacy, social mobilization and behaviour change (UNICEF, 2015).

Effective communication is highly essential for the implementation of primary health care. This is possible through services carried out at primary health care centers and during home visits. Community involvement and participation are also vital ingredients of PHC. This is made possible through utilization of the components of PHC as indicated by Ajayi (2004) to include.

1. Health education concerning the prevailing health problems in the community
2. Provision of food supply and proper nutrition
3. Adequate supply of safe water and basic sanitation
4. Maternal and child health care including family planning
5. Immunization against communicable diseases
6. Prevention and control of locally endemic and epidemic diseases
7. Appropriate treatment of common diseases and injuries.

8. Provision of essential drugs
9. Dental care
10. Mental health (WHO – UNICEF, 1978)

These services must be carried out at the primary health care facilities and communicated to the clients using the language they will understand so as to send home the information for appropriate feedback from the receiver. Without this, efforts will amount to not passing any health information across to clients. Primary health care services well communicated in a language well understood by the clients has shown to be a good value investment, as it is evident that quality primary health care reduces total health care costs and improves efficiency by reducing hospital admissions.

Strong and well communicated primary health care services are essential to achieving the health related sustainable development Goals (SDG's) and universal health coverage. This will contribute immensely to the attainment of other goals beyond the health sector. It includes reduction in poverty, hunger, gender equality, provision of clean and portable water, sanitation, work and economic growth, reduction of inequality and climate change.

All the components of primary health care like health education, maternal and child health care, immunization against

communicable diseases, provision of essential drugs, treatment of minor ailments, family planning, mental health care, dental health, provision of potable water, environmental sanitation and adequate nutrition are all tailored towards the improvement of the health of the masses and reduction in morbidity and mortality of the masses. It is therefore very essential to pass all the necessary messages across to the recipients in a language they will understand.

Primary health care or PHC is the essential health care that is based on scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology which make universal health care accessible to all individuals and families in a community. Primary health care services are given to individuals and families in the community through full involvement and participation at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination. It is a health care services that cover a range of prevention, wellness and treatment for common ailments. Aighiremolen, Alenoghena Eboreime and Abejegah (2014) defined primary health care as grass-root management approach for providing healthcare services to communities. It is designed to address the main health problems in the community by providing

preventive, curative and rehabilitative services.

According to Ajayi (2004) Primary health care is a whole of society approach to health and well-being centered on the needs and preferences of individuals, families and communities. It addresses the broader determinants of health and focuses on the comprehensive and interrelated aspects of physical, mental, social health and well-being. It provides a person's need for health care throughout life not just for a set of specific diseases. It ensures people receive comprehensive care ranging from promotion and prevention to treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care as close and as feasible to people's everyday environment. Primary health care is also referred to as provision of ambulatory or first-level personal health care services. It is a set of priority health interventions for low income populations. As laudable as this programme is in meeting health needs of people at the grass-root level, there is need for effective communication of the basic components to the receivers for them to benefit maximally from the programme.

The programme is important to the health needs of the populace hence the reasons for its effective communication to respond to rapid economic, technological and demographic changes all of which impact health and people's well-being. Primary health care has been proven to be a

highly effective and efficient way of addressing the main causes and risks of poor health and well-being of masses as well as handling the emerging challenges that threatens health and well-being of tomorrow. Primary health care services well communicated in a language well understood by the clients has shown to be a good value investment, as it reduces total health care costs and improves efficiency by reducing hospital admissions.

Park (2007) asserted that the principles of primary health care underscore the great value of the approach, these principles which include essential health care, community participation, equity, intersectional collaboration and the use of appropriate technology are the driving forces behind the efficiency of primary health care as the hope of achieving universal health coverage.

Primary health care (PHC) was established to provide services to the majority of people based on needs without geographical, social or financial barriers through their involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of health programmes. It implies drawing resources from within and outside the health sector and utilizing technologies on the basis of suitability.

Alenoghena, Abejegah, Eboreime, Aigbiremolen (2014) posited that Nigeria, like other parts of the world has its own

peculiarities characterizing the health care system. These peculiarities are related to cultural, religious, and sociopolitical diversities. Thus, effective communication is needed to implement PHC to meet the challenges associated with these diversities because it will help to improve health care delivery system. PHC according to Lucas & Gilles (2006) include community mobilization and advocacy, service integration, health research, capacity building, integration of international organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, FAO, etc. and non-governmental collaborations.

Health education is the combination of learning experiences designed to help individuals and communities, improve their health by increasing their knowledge or influencing their attitudes. It teaches about physical, mental, emotional and social health. It motivates individuals to improve and maintain their health, prevent disease and reduce risky behaviors. It helps students to learn skills that will help them make healthy choices throughout their lifetime.

It is worth of note that most people walk about with varied health problems that are unnoticed by other individuals. These health hazards constitute serious problems to the health status of the people affected and their families. The only measure to reduce this menace is through effective

communication using the right language to communicate with the clients. This can be achieved through health education. Frontiers of knowledge will be pushed forward while ignorance would be rolled backwards.

A healthy nation is said to be a wealthy nation. Every nation including Nigeria ought to attain good health that will permit or enable individual to attain the peak of their social and economic life goals. It is this desire of everyone to attain optimal health and wellbeing world-wide that led to the birth of primary health care. To this effect, primary health care had health education as the most effective of all its components. Supporting this view, Ejima (2007) asserted that of all the components of PHC, health education well communicated is the pivot on which the rest of other components are hinged and the vehicle by which the set objectives and principles of primary health care could be achieved.

The extent to which the goals of primary healthcare delivery would be achieved depends strongly on the level of health education effectively communicated. The World Health Organization (2002) has identified five key elements to achieving this goal which are interconnecting principles of equity, access to health care delivery system by all, empowerment, community involvement and participation,

self –determination and inter-sectorial collaboration all of which depends on effective communication.

Moronkola and Okanlawon (2003) posited that health education empowers the consumer in the community to manage their health process effectively and to cope with social and economic changes. Effective health education is tailored towards behavioural change which could be achieved by making people to understand and feel the need for a change and ability to make positive healthy decision.

Effective communication of health related information to the populace is very essential. These are practices and procedures that health workers use to teach their audience, learners or clients to make them understand and learn what they are passing across to them. It could either be determined by the nature of clients or by the subject matter. Primary Health care personnel do instruct their patients or clients on daily basis on what to do in order to remain healthy, to be cured from illnesses or to prevent diseases either with or without the use of drugs. Therefore, it is imperative that they pass such instructions to their clients in an acceptable and courteous manner. Observations and complaints from patients has revealed that many health workers pass instructions to patients in an unfriendly manner or with such an arrogant and disrespectful attitudes

that even the hearts of patients feel disgust for the treatment they are about to give them or the help they are about to render on their health condition. Examples of such incidence is the case of some midwives who talk anyhow to patients especially pregnant women during labour and delivery, e. g. did you cry when you and your husband were enjoying yourselves? It is a fact that healing starts from the heart therefore, the researcher is of the opinion that if such primary health care personnel are well groomed on effective communication and also have a knowledge of teaching methodologies, it could change their orientation on ways of passing instructions to patients, it will expose them to better human relations having individual differences at the back of their mind. It will also expose them to means of motivating their clients to follow every instruction being passed to them.

There are different methods of passing information to clients which are incidentally teaching methods. Examples are: lecture method, discussion method, demonstration method, role play methods, to mention a few. The influence of communicating effectively with clients cannot be overemphasized, it is crucial to healthcare delivery. It is therefore, very essential for all health care delivery personnel to learn and use these methods appropriately while communicating.

Appropriate language of communication with clients, having at the back of their minds the culture and values of the people, will go a long way to accelerate sustainable development in the nation.

Communication in healthcare setting is one of the most important tools for providing great patient's care and improving patient's satisfaction. However, lines of communication can frequently be crossed and lead to lower patient satisfaction and wellness, hospital readmissions could be avoided with better communication among healthcare teams and between providers and patients."

Every patient who comes to a hospital has a team of people involved in providing care throughout their healing process: from doctors and nurses to housekeepers, culinary teams, and even their family and loved ones. With so many parties involved, effective communication could even regulate patient's blood pressure. Therefore patient care should be taken seriously and personnel should be trained to avoid the use of abusive, insulting and disrespectful languages that could lead to early grave of patients. Rather, they should learn to communicate effectively to provide excellent patient care.

When discussing how health workers can impact the patient experience, HHS Chief Operating Officer, Bobby Floyd, noted that patients have a higher

expectation of the type of care they are going to receive when they are in the hospital, and not just from nurses and doctors but also from support services such as housekeepers. They expect courtesy communications from all, including room technicians and other frontline primary health care personnel.

Therefore, they need to not only perform their day to day duties, but also be able to apply good communicative strategies to address needs of patients. The way health workers address or speak with patients will determine whether the need of that patient or not will be met. Primary health care delivery personnel have a variety of clients or patients to communicate with, therefore, they need to learn different strategies of communicating effectively.

Here are a few of the strategies that can be used by healthcare personnel to consistently communicate effectively:

- i. Utilizing hospitality methodologies and principles established by the Disney Institute, Cleveland Clinic, and Studies Group, which teaches how to initiate a meaningful connection with patients.
- ii. Empathy and use of key words to effectively communicate with patients and visitors during times of needs in order to give quality care.
- iii. Use of smile, calm and welcoming voice, according to HHS Regional

Director David Sadara, "Everyone else is rushing in and out and most times they don't even know who is in the ward, therefore a health worker can take time to introduce himself and tell the patients how he is going to take care of them, open the blinds, prop them up to be more comfortable, ask how they are doing, and tell them that he will keep them in his thoughts when they say they are not feeling well. These little gestures can make a big difference."

- iv. Nurturing relationships with other healthcare workers to ensure a helpful and integrated part of a team, this allows them to complete tasks that would otherwise have taken their time away from providing patients with necessary care. Effective communication with the patients and other health workers will ensure that patients are receiving the best care possible.
- v. Utilizing the "do not pass rule:" If a call light is on, health worker must stop to check on the patient to see how they can help. If there is a simple task, such as providing additional blankets or toiletries, they must assist the patient directly. Should more specialized care be needed and help to ensure that assistance is provided quickly when urgently needed.

The quality of communication will determine its impact; therefore this paper is

out to reduce communication deficiencies to the barest minimal. John Wiley & Sons (2015) discovered that poor communication can lead to various negative outcomes, disunity of care, compromise of patient safety, patient dissatisfaction, inefficient use of valuable resources and economic consequences. It can even lead to misapplication of drugs and death of clients.

Other means of communicating effectively include:

- i. **The Silent Treatment: Remaining silent can be one of the most effective methods for communicating effectively with patients, especially if one is trying to entice them to share more information.** Instead of immediately answering after the patient's completed statement, one can remain silent but attentive. For example

Person A: My daughter just had a baby!

Person B: (responds immediately) wao! How adorable! Is it a boy or girl?

The information about the gender of the baby has to be coaxed out of person A rather than being freely offered. Now, using silent treatment will be:

Person A: My daughter just had a baby!

Person B: (remains silent but attentive)

Person A: She had a 3kg baby girl named Abigail. She's my second grandchild but my first granddaughter!

Instead of having to encourage the communication, the conversation continues naturally on its own.

- ii. **Asking of Questions:** Everything can't be known about a person without asking questions.

Asking of open ended questions (questions not requiring yes or no but an explanation) can also be effective: i.e "what brings you here?" instead of "can I help you?"

- iii. **Empathy:** Empathy or emotional awareness are also essential for a clear transfer of knowledge. One can easily recognize when one's own emotions are causing issues with one's communication. Being empathetic gives one the ability to discern when the emotions of others are likely to cause a problem. Empathy is in part emotional awareness, and also body language translation. One can often discern the emotional state of a person by simply looking at how he holds himself. A happy person will walk with their head up and shoulders

back. He will make eye contact and will smile, or respond easily to an offered smile. A sad person, on the other hand, will often walk with their shoulders hunched and head bowed. They will not often respond to an offered smile, and if they do it will not reach their eyes. Effective communication is required to help out people in these situations

- iv. **Enthusiasm:** This can actually be as simple as maintaining eye contact, and modifying one's body language to appear attentive and interested
- v. **Language Choice:** If one is trying to foster a sense of solidarity and cooperation, the use of pronouns like "we" and "us" will help clients to consider themselves part of a team, rather than as an individual; Giving them a sense of love and acceptance.
- vi. **Honesty:** Honesty is often one of the largest barriers to effective communication, but it is one of the easiest to overcome. Effective communication is largely based on trust. Therefore, primary health care personnel must be trustworthy and reliable.
- vii. **Not stopping learning:** This is often the biggest mistake that people make when learning to

communicate effectively. They think that there is nothing left for them to learn. Albert Einstein once said it best, once you stop learning, you start dying. This is very essential as knowledge is dynamic and continuous. Learning will make for continuous improvement in the way health workers communicate with patients on daily basis.

The influence of effective communication on health education has been strongly highlighted at the Alama Ata conference, where it was pointed out that health is an individual responsibility and it must be ensured that every individual is health conscious, to be able to achieve healthy living practices and seek appropriate health attention when the need arises. In Nigeria today, effective health education has helped primary health care to achieve its goals in so many areas such improvement in maternal and child health care thereby reducing maternal morbidity and mortality rate. Infant mortality and morbidity rate has also reduced drastically.

If messages are communicated to people effectively with empathy, for example the lives of pregnant women who are dying on daily basis for going to quack maternity homes to deliver their babies, might be preserved, if health workers are more friendly in their choice of words. There will be increase in coverage and

improved health of children. There will be mass reduction in the killer diseases known as communicable diseases through high level immunization coverage. Use of effective communication in the area of family planning will also reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies leading to unwanted babies in the society, especially as many illiterates and semi-illiterates think that family planning is evil and could kill them. People visiting quack doctors for avoidance of disrespect for their personality should have desist from such.

Above all, good nutrition which is the basis for survival will also be improved tremendously through correct effective communication. It would lead to eating of the right diet at the right quantity and quality, also at the right time for healthy living. Knowledge about health related matters communicated to the society will be translated into practice since such will influence their beliefs, attitude and habits.

Awosusi (2018) asserted that health care services during pregnancy and after delivery has been described as important tools in promoting maternal health and avoiding morbidity or mortality associated with pregnancy, childbirth and maternal care. Health education is a complex activity in which different individuals and organizations play a part. Among them are parents, teachers, friends, physicians, nurses, health workers and various

organizations both governmental and non-governmental. Since no country can afford to employ institutionally trained health workers alone, health education therefore should be the concern of everybody engaged in community welfare work (Park 2007).

Park (2007) asserted that maternal and child health refers to the preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative health care for mothers and children. It includes areas such as: maternal health, child health, family planning, school health and care of physically challenged children. The objectives of maternal and child health as stated by the World Health Organization (2005) are:

- To reduce maternal morbidity and mortality
- To reduce infant and childhood mortality and morbidity
- To promote reproductive health
- Promotion of physical and psychological development of the child

The means of bringing the above stated objectives to play includes the use of ante-natal care, prenatal care, intra natal care and post natal care. Ante-natal care is the care of a woman as soon as conception is diagnosed and continued throughout pregnancy to achieve a healthy mother and baby. Effective communication of vital health issues that will keep the woman and the baby health and prevent complications

should be well-spelt out to the pregnant women at the ante-natal clinic in the language she would understand. Effective communication of essential information will create high level of awareness for the pregnant women in order to promote, protect and maintain the health of the mother during pregnancy and childbirth. It will also help to detect “high risk” cases and give them special attention also to foresee complications and avoid them. Communication in the ante-natal clinics will also allow the pregnant women to give feed backs to the health educators or health workers on what they have heard and also ask questions on issues bothering their minds.

The pre-natal care concerns care of the pregnant woman and the baby. Communicating health education issues are mostly received at this time and the points should cover not only the problems of pregnancy and childbirth but overflow to family and child health care. The importance of nutritious and balanced diet, personal hygiene, personal cleanliness, rest and sleep, moderate exercise, avoidance of drug use and abuse and the signs of imminent labor are all vital issues that should be communicated to them in the language they best understand. The intra natal care is the care given during child birth. The need for effective intra natal care is indispensable with emphasis on

cleanliness and avoidance of exposure to infections for the mother, the baby and the health workers. Egboniwe et al (2016) asserted that maternal morbidity could be prevented if skilled health attendants who are health professionals like (midwives, doctors, nurses) functions with appropriate equipment, drugs, supplies and provisions of life saving interventions. Also strict measures should be taken to control infections by maintaining high level of hygienic practices.

The post natal care is the care given to the mother and the new born baby after delivery. Communicating the necessary care will ensure healthy mother and child, prevent complications and ensure rapid restoration of the mother to optimum health.

Conclusion

Effective communication can influence Primary Health Care delivery because it could bring about reduction in risky behaviours of clients which depend largely on the clients understanding of the risk and the importance of change. Use of appropriate language in communicating health information during primary health care delivery helps to promote healthy nation and prevent chronic diseases thereby bringing health benefits to the greatest number of people in the society.

Effective communication of health messages helps to reduce gaps created by

differences in culture, location, social status, ethnicity, education and other factors that can affect health matters

Recommendations

1. Effective communication is a tool to improve the level of reception of health programmes hence the need for all health workers to appreciate this and improve their relationship with their clients to encourage improvement in participation and involvement in health matters.
2. Government should provide training and retraining for health workers on communication skills, etiques and etiquette guiding their professions to boost their inter-personal relationship with their clients and the community at large.

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